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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BANGKOK 000311

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [TH](#)
SUBJECT: COUPMAKERS' HAUNTED DREAMS: BANGKOK INSIDER GIVES
DISTURBING ASSESSMENT OF POLITICAL SITUATION

REF: A. BANGKOK 234

[1](#)B. BANGKOK 152

[1](#)C. 05 BANGKOK 1470

Classified By: Ambassador Ralph L. Boyce, reason 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY and INTRODUCTION: One of Thailand's most respected jurists, with close ties to both the Thaksin administration and the current leadership, expressed serious concerns about the ability of the interim government to hold together and complete the transition to democracy according to the plan laid out by the coupmakers in September. During a meeting with the Ambassador on January 12, Borwornsak Uwanno warned that the challenges the current leadership faces could derail the transition back to democracy. He complained that Prime Minister Surayud was too much like an "English gentleman." The government's economic failures had undermined its credibility, as had the lack of progress on the investigation of the New Year's bomb attacks. He said that some of the junta members "had been approached" to stage another coup, presumably in response to the growing sense of political impasse which has undermined support for the interim government. Although the constitution might be finished faster than planned, there was a real possibility that it might not pass the referendum, potentially leading to yet further political crisis.

[1](#)2. (C) Borwornsak was the Cabinet Secretary-General under Thaksin. He quit the position in 2006 to distance himself from the PM, but is still viewed with great suspicion by civil society and the opposition political parties for his role as one of Thaksin's advisors. He is close to CNS General Secretary Winai Phatthiyakul, in part because both of them were detained together by the military during the 1991 coup d'etat. A consummate insider and representative of the "Bangkok elite," he is well-positioned to comment on the internal workings of the interim government/CNS, and we think his concerns are well-founded. End summary and introduction.

[1](#)3. (C) During a January 12 meeting with Ambassador, Borwornsak Uwanno joined the chorus of criticism of the interim government as "too soft" and ineffective. Bemoaning the slow pace of action on a host of important issues such as

the corruption investigations, he complained that Prime Minister Surayud Chulanont was too much like an "English gentleman." Borwornsak said that he had raised his concerns with Surayud directly, who had reacted by saying that, if he was not good enough, he was prepared to resign. Borwornsak did not want Surayud to resign, but was frustrated by the many missteps of his administration.

ECONOMIC MISSTEPS

14. (C) Borwornsak started with economic problems. "No governor has any budget to do anything," he said. The budget has just been promulgated, and funding will eventually reach the provinces, but there is another problem: no one knows what to do about the Thaksin-era spending plans for the so-called "mega-projects" and other populist programs. The government "has not given any signal" about whether it favors the continuation of all these projects, so the provincial officials are afraid to proceed with them, for fear of being tarnished as Thaksin supporters. This would have an effect on economic growth.

15. (C) Borwornsak was also highly critical of Deputy Prime Minister Pridyathorn's proposals for the amendment of the Alien Business Act (ref B). "I want to tell Pridyathorn not to do anything without consulting political people," he said, in order to avoid the kind of public relations blunders that have characterized Pridyathorn's initiatives. Borwornsak said that the Council of State (legal and technical advisors to the government) would "freeze" the amendments so that the draft "would not even get to Parliament." If/when the amendments were submitted to the Parliament, they would not pass. The plan by opponents of the bill was to call for the

BANGKOK 00000311 002 OF 003

creation of a committee to study the bill, and thereby delay it for an extended period of time.

CONSTITUTION COULD FACE OBSTACLES

16. (C) The Ambassador told Borwornsak we were pleased to see the statement by the head of the 100-person Constitution Drafting Assembly (CDA) saying that the drafters might be able to finish their work faster than the 180 days set out in the interim charter. Borwornsak agreed that this was possible, but also underscored some serious problems ahead. He identified two very sensitive issues: Would Buddhism be named the state religion, and would the PM have to be selected from among the elected members of Parliament? We noted that the idea of an unelected prime minister seemed to excite very violent opposition, and there might be persistent street protests against such a provision. Borwornsak agreed. On the state religion, Borwornsak said that there were "Buddhist extremists" who would try to push through a provision making Buddhism the state religion -- this issue came up with every new constitution. Borwornsak said that there would be opposition from the King on this issue, particularly because of concerns about the response in the Muslim-majority far South. While some of these issues would require time for debate, Borwornsak felt that, if the soon-to-be-named 35 member Drafting Committee had a competent chairman who was a good manager, it could finish the work quickly.

17. (C) However, completing the draft quickly would not end Thailand's constitution woes, Borwornsak warned. He believed that there was a good chance that the draft new constitution would not pass the required referendum. He pointed to the controversy over the state religion as one of the issues that might sink the new charter. (Comment: others have pointed out that vote-buying could play a role as well, if particular interest decided that sinking the constitution would work in their favor. End comment.)

OH NO, NOT AGAIN - "RE-COUP?"

18. (C) Borwornsak launched into a convoluted account of the investigation into the New Year's Eve bombings. He joined the criticism of national police chief Kowit, implying that he had been in the south on December 31 because he had some kind of foreknowledge of the bombing and wanted to shift the responsibility for the response to his deputy. But Borwornsak also claimed that the Council for National Security (CNS) thought they had identified Thaksin supporters behind the bombing, not General Chavalit or the police (two popular recent suspects.) A military source told Borwornsak that the bombs were like those planted last year at the Democrat party and at the residence of Privy Council president Gen. Prem (ref C). Surayud is feeling the pressure to do something in response to the lack of progress by police in the investigation; Borwornsak predicted that the police chief would be out of his job shortly. (Comment: We keep hearing different stories about these bombs (ref A) and will try to get more definitive information from the forensics team, which should have a final report ready this week. Most sources are saying the bombs are constructed like those in the south; this is the first claim we've heard linking them to the previous bombs in Bangkok. End comment.)

19. (C) Given the political tensions and uncertainties, Borwornsak warned that a "re-coup" was possible. He said that both Gen. Sonthi and Gen. Winai "had been approached" to stage a further military intervention. Borwornsak did not go into detail on what this would entail, but the idea has been circulating in Bangkok, even cropping up in the Thai press as "the only way out" of what is beginning to feel like another political impasse. Presumably, the "re-coup" would involve some bolder members of the junta taking over, easing out the more cautious leaders, and putting in place "a new gameplan." This would likely include a faster track in the Thaksin

BANGKOK 00000311 003 OF 003

corruption investigations -- perhaps seizing assets first, and justifying it later -- and maybe dropping the constitution drafting process. (Comment: Although a coup against one's own government sounds ridiculous, this has happened here before: elected prime minister Thanom launched a coup against his own government in 1971. Thanom dissolved Parliament, banned political parties and strengthened military rule until he was forced to flee the country two years later in the wake of violent protests. End comment.) The Ambassador said that such a move would be disastrous for Thailand, and Borwornsak agreed. "Talk to Winai," he said. Borwornsak - who was brought in by the junta in the early hours of the September 19 coup to assist with legal issues -- said he told Winai, "If you do this, don't call on me; I won't help you."

OH NO, NOT AGAIN -- THAKSIN RETURNS?

110. (C) And then there's Thaksin. Borwornsak said that he had gotten an odd call on January 1 from Thaksin. During the call, Thaksin made a point of saying that the New Year's bombs looked like the work of southern insurgents. He complained about the accusations raised against him and speculated over whether he should come back to Thailand to refute them. Borwornsak said that this was the first call he had gotten from Thaksin since he had resigned his government job last year; he thought the call from Thaksin "not natural," but he didn't know quite what to make of it.

COMMENT

111. (C) Borwornsak told the Ambassador, "the CNS is not sleeping well at night," and we believe it. Before the new year's bombing, many of the coup's early supporters were disillusioned and impatient; since the bombing, many seem

angry and afraid. The government's popularity has plummeted, as has confidence in its ability to deliver on its promises. While the idea of a "coup within the coup" seems outlandish, but there is a growing feeling that the interim government/CNS have painted themselves into a corner, are "weak," "feeble," and "too gentlemanly," (to quote from some of the headlines.) They are hemmed in by provisions of the interim constitution and the legal procedures they themselves established; now they find that they may be unable to achieve the goal of their putsch - ensuring that Thaksin cannot return to power again -- unless they make, at a minimum, a drastic course change. Stopping the wayward ministers from wasting political capital on their pet peeves about morality issues, accelerating the anti-corruption investigations, and convincing the public they have gotten a grip on the security situation would be a start, but probably not sufficient to win back the good will they have lost through their ineffective leadership. Although the talk about another coup is still pure speculation, we will continue to let people know the unequivocal USG view: that another "coup" or related action would be whole unjustified and indefensible, and disastrous for Thailand's relations with the U.S. and other countries.

BOYCE